



Michael F. Easley
Governor

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William G. Ross Jr.
Secretary, DENR

Ross endorses Natural Heritage Inventories

Natural Heritage and Resource Management programs receive funds

By Tamara Ward
Publications Coordinator

When the North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust Fund board of directors met Sept. 27 to award grants totaling more than \$6.8 million, NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary William G. Ross Jr. was present to emphasize the importance of continued funding for county inventories of natural resources being conducted by the Natural Heritage Program in the NC Division of Parks and Recreation.

Ross told the trust fund's directors that the department needs a complete inventory of the state's natural resources in order to measure the relative natural significance of land in counties across the state. The information is valuable in planning for lands purchases in light of the Million Acre Initiative

and its goal of preserving one million additional acres of open space in North Carolina by the end of the decade.

"The important part is that we know as much about the natural resource values of the land as possible," Ross said. "We've got a huge job here, and we all have a critical role. If we do it, generations from now will say 'thank goodness.'"

The Natural Heritage Trust Fund board granted \$150,000 to the Natural Heritage Program, the full amount requested, to continue its statewide, county-by-county inventories of natural resources. The inventories began in the mid-1980s. Currently, 60 county inventories are completed and 10 are under way, leaving 30 counties remaining to be inventoried. Inventories identify rare plant and

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Weymouth Woods dedicates new exhibits

By Charlie Peek
Public Information Officer

SOUTHERN PINES – A few weeks after Karl Zorowski began work in 1996 as an exhibits coordinator with the NC Division of Parks and Recreation, he was given design drawings for new museum exhibits at Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve.

Exactly five years from his first day on the job, Zorowski helped dedicate the new exhibits during a short ceremony at the state park. It was a long and difficult process renovating one of the parks system's first museums, but an important one, he said.



WEYMOUTH WOODS STAFF AND KARL ZOROWSKI, EXHIBITS COORDINATOR, AT THE DEDICATION.

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Department of Environment and Natural Resources

NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST FUND

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animal species and provided details about the best examples of natural communities in the state.

Linda Pearsall, head of the Natural Heritage Program, said part of the money would be used to hire additional biologists. Biologists would be divided into five teams, and that would significantly increase the rate in which each county inventory is completed. Pearsall's goal is to complete the remaining inventories within six years.

The trust fund awarded

an additional \$150,000 to the division's Resource Management Program to purchase land along the Pamlico River adjacent to Goose Creek State Park.

"The acquisition will allow us to expand the longest segment of publicly owned, undeveloped, low-salinity estuarine shoreline in the state," said Sue Regier, head of the division's Resource Management Program.

The Natural Heritage Trust Fund also provided funds to five other state agencies. The Wildlife

Resources Commission was awarded a total of more than \$3.3 million for three projects. One of the projects is a Craven County corridor along the outer coastal plain between Croatan National Forest and areas north of Neuse River.

Another award of more than \$1.5 million went to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to purchase land in Sampson County to protect endangered plant and animal species, several Carolina bays, longleaf pine savannas and Atlantic white cedar stands.

The trust fund awarded \$842,000 to the Division of Coastal Management for three projects. The largest portion will go to preserve Bird Island, an undeveloped barrier island that supports federally threatened and endangered species.

The Division of Forest Resources also will receive funds to expand Bladen Lakes State Forest. And, the Department of Cultural Resources received funds to purchase property along the Perquimans River and an 18-acre tract that contains the remnants of a Native American village site.

The NC General Assembly established the Natural Heritage Trust Fund in 1987 as a supplemental funding source for state agencies. Money for the trust fund comes from the deed stamp tax and receipts from the sale of personalized license plates.

Last year, the trust fund awarded nearly \$13.5 million. Part of the funds were allocated to the Division of Parks and Recreation for projects at Hanging Rock, Crowders Mountain and Lumber River state parks, as well as to Lee Island Natural Area. Natural Heritage Program inventories also were funded last year.



TOM ELLIS, FORMER SUPERINTENDENT OF STATE PARKS, WORKS TO IMPROVE A PARK TRAIL WITH LOCAL BOY SCOUTS AT THE PARK.

SEVERAL PARKS HOLD EVENTS ON NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY

Four NC state parks took part in National Public Lands Day, a calling for volunteers across the nation to improve and learn about public lands. This year's events were held September 29.

Goose Creek State park held an environmental education workshop to promote wetlands and celebrate the national day.

Hanging Rock State Park placed a plaque on the dinner bell column in front of the foundation of the Mess Hall. The plaque commemorates the CCC's work. The park held other educational

events that day. Also, boy scouts cleared undergrowth around the original site of CCC Camp 3422 in preparation for the ceremony.

Singletary Lake State Park held a trail renaming ceremony. The park's one-mile loop trail was renamed CCC-Carolina Bay Loop Trail. Also, volunteers worked on trails.

William B. Umstead State Park held an educational program, and volunteers completed a variety of work, from trail repair and maintenance to lake cleanup.

AMEN CORNER

The following is a letter and poem sent to two rangers at William B. Umstead State Park. Have you had more good words on the division and its employees? Send them along to The Steward so that we can share.

Dear Karl Erik Nygard and Stan Dunston,

If you will remember, on Saturday July 21, you were able to recover a group of straying teenagers and reunite them with their comrades and patient chaperones. The accounts below are dedicated to and show our thanks for your efforts in our time of crisis. We hope you enjoy them.

An account told from the perspective of a person who didn't get lost...

Upon arrival at Umstead Park,
We started out like Lewis and Clark.
We scrambled for our lunches,
And grabbed maps by the bunches.

So we followed our fearless leader
Feeling at home among the cedar
Kept in line from behind by his counterpart
Through the woods we began to depart.

Little did we know that among us dwelled
A deficiency in reason and in path-finding as well.

Our fellow hikers, oblivious to all,
Might as well have been on a trip to the mall.

When, after a while, we gathered as a group,
Counting our members, we found that our troop
Had drastically shrunk and had fallen apart
We had thirteen less hikers than we had at the start.

A little nervous that our friends were not there,
We told some kind rangers how we lost them and where.
And with enthusiasm, dedication, and class,
The rangers finally found them at last.

When we caught up they were standing there waiting,
The rangers and our fellow comrades contemplating.
Although arguing and carping about which group got lost,
We were finally together no matter the cost.

The group that got lost...

When our group arrived to go for a hike,
And picked out sandwiches, those that we liked,
Thinking I could use it, I picked up a map
Preparing as always for any mishap.

All of us stopped for lunch by a stream,
Hiking again in teams it might seem,
My friends and I lost sight of the front,
But never intended to face such a hunt.

Once we thirteen reached the end of the trail,
Walking ahead and running back still failed
To find someone whom we recognized
From the group that was larger in size.

We asked hikers and bikers, who stopped with a spin,
But no matter what, we could not win.
The group seemed gone forever, it's true.
But we were lucky, and found a ranger or two.

Leading us to the right path,
He prepared us to face our leader's wrath
There we waited with anticipation,
Knowing we'd soon be facing some major irritation.

Around the bend joyous voices cried out,
They had reached us at last, through the rocks and the grout.
Luckily, finally, at last we were together,
And once on the bus, all was much better.

Once again, thank you very much for all that you did to help us. We really appreciate it.

Sincerely,
Amber Field and Kate Tucker
The Governor's School Students



SURVEY REPORTS LOW LEVELS OF PLANT POACHING IN NC STATE PARKS

The problem of plant poaching on public lands has been a growing concern in recent years. An estimated \$5.3 million worth of ginseng roots has been poached from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park within the last nine years, according to an article distributed by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). With wild plants selling at high prices — NWF reports that one pound of dried ginseng roots, more than 600 plants, is worth \$270 to \$600 — the battle between the national park's rangers and plant poachers has escalated.

A survey to find out if NC state parks are also suffering from plant poachers was recently conducted within the NC Division of Parks and Recreation. Compiled by Jame Amoroso, botanist for the NC Division of Parks and Recreation's Natural Heritage Program, the survey showed that the problem is not nearly as large as that in national parks. However, as Amoroso stated in a report that interprets the survey's findings, "since many parks do not have the personnel to perform regular back-country patrols, this low number of citations may indicate not a low amount of poaching of plants, but low instances of catching poachers in the act."

During the past three years, no more than four citations per year for illegal plant collection have been reported in the state parks system, according to Tom Jackson, the division's chief ranger. In most reported instances, park visitors

were collecting small numbers plants for personal use, rather than large quantities for commercial sale.

In the recent survey, park superintendents reported none, low amounts and moderate amounts of plant poaching. The worst case of plant poaching was reported at Eno River State Park, where plant poachers have entirely extirpated ginseng from the park. The last known specimen was reported in 1993.

Most of the 36 species of plants poached from state parks were reported as being taken from only one park. Plants that were poached from two or more parks were galax, ginseng, ladyslipper orchids and sea oats. Amoroso reported that five species poached from state parks have a state or federal status, or are listed by the Natural Heritage Program as significantly rare or a candidate for that category. These include cabbage palm, Fraser fir, ginseng, rock gnome lichen and Venus flytrap.

Amoroso recommends educating park visitors about the no-collection policy through programs and signage. Her report also encourages park staff to inform visitors about the tracking methods used to locate poached plants and the ability of the park to prosecute plant poachers for illegally collecting plants. By educating park visitors, would-be plant poachers might decide to take a picture instead of the plant.



STATE EMPLOYEES COMBINED CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF

It began with a bang, a two-hour celebration on the lawn in front of the Archdale Building on Sept. 28. The State Employees Combined Campaign kicked off with a celebration complete with music and games, as well as free hot dogs, popcorn and soda. But at the center of the event were lines of booths representing many of the charities seeking donations.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources encourages employees to give to these organizations through the campaign. All staff should have received a pledge form and information materials on the campaign.

Pictured at left, the Division of Parks and Recreation's Sue Reiger and Judy Warren enjoyed a round of horseshoes at the event.

WATER LOW AT MILLPOND, CANOEING AT RISK



ABOVE, HELMS PUSHES HIS CANOE THROUGH THE SHALLOW WATER NEAR THE CANOE LAUNCH AREA. BELOW, THE RINGS AROUND TREES ARE ANOTHER INDICATION OF THE LOW WATER LEVEL.



If the trees at Merchants Millpond State Park seem taller lately, it's probably just because the water is lower. The millpond's water level this fall is approximately 25 inches below the top of the spillway, lower than Park Superintendent Robert Helms says he's seen in his 20-year tenure at the park, and lower than many

local residents say they've seen in their lifetimes.

The low water level, caused mainly by the lack of heavy winter rains at the park, has affected canoeing, one of the more popular activities at the park. The 760 acres of water typically available to canoeists at the park has been reduced by almost 75 percent, and Lassiter Swamp is inaccessible by canoe.

If the millpond's water level falls further, the park may be forced to suspend canoe rentals until rains replenish the pond. The water's edge has receded almost beyond the end of the pier at the canoe launch area. And, without park canoe rentals, many of the park's campsites will be accessible only to people willing to launch private boats from a different area of the pond that is near highway access.

WEYMOUTH WOODS

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"If we really want to preserve all of these natural resources, we've got to teach people about them. . . we now have the exhibits here that can do that every hour that the museum's open," Zorowski told the invited guests.

Park Superintendent Scott Hartley arranged for the ceremony to dedicate the 1,000-square-foot museum after its \$238,000 facelift. In its time, Hartley said, the museum had state-of-the-art exhibits – using eight-track audiotapes and slide projectors that gradually faltered and died over the years.

The museum again has state-of-the-art interactive equipment that teaches visitors about the longleaf pine forest and the use of prescribed fire to manage and nurture it. "These new exhibits are a very important tool in

helping us accomplish that task," Hartley said.

One honored guest at the dedication was Jim Boyd, a descendent of the family that set aside the portion of the longleaf pine forest that became the preserve in the 1960s.

Zorowski noted that the long delay in getting construction started in the mid-1990s worked to the advantage of the division which began with \$90,000 set aside from the 1993 bond referendum for parks improvements. During the interim, the project garnered more funds from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. That resulted in at least twice the number of new exhibits, he said.

A focal point in the museum is a 10-foot-high "wall of fire," a lighted photomural that introduces visitors to prescribed burning.

Other exhibits include:

- An underground diorama where visitors can crawl beneath the forest to view wildlife that seeks shelter there.

- A large mural by illustrator Brooks Pearce that depicts flora and fauna in the park. Pushbuttons allow visitors to hear their calls.

- A naval stores exhibit that allows visitors to stir an old-time bucket of resin.

The long-popular "Sounds of the Night" exhibit has been updated. Visitors can take an imaginary walk through the Sandhills at night and see and hear the animals that live there. Through audio and lighting effects on this nighttime diorama, visitors can experience "Darkness in the Pines," "Ghosts of the Sandhills Swamps and Seeps" and "Things That Go Bump in the Night."

What once was lost is now found

Restorable remnant of esteemed savannah discovered

By Tamara Ward

Publications Coordinator

They thought it was gone, plowed under and planted over, every last acre of it.

Decades and decades ago, in the 1920s, the savannah was really something — so vast, it was discovered when Bertram W. Wells glanced out a window of a speeding railroad car. Wells, Ph.D., esteemed North Carolina ecologist, “nature’s champion” as he was titled in a biography, spent years in the Pender County savannah, exploring its wonders day after day, finding it teeming with spectacular life, an ecology found nowhere else in the world with a variety of rare plants — Carolina goldenrod and savanna yellow-eyed grass, feather-bristle beaksedge and bog bluestem. The savannah became known locally as “Big Savannah” and “Burgaw Savannah.”

When the owner of the land offered to sell the savannah to a garden club, the offer was refused, probably laughed at. The area was a wetland; who would want anything to do with it? The soil was sodden and would be cumbersome to plow. Certainly, no one would try to cultivate it. But what was unthinkable became a reality. A farmer from Ohio bought the land and used a modern dragline to work the soil. Wells and others fought to save the savannah, tried to preserve it, to no avail. What once boasted an assortment of rare plants sprouted cash crops.

So they thought it was gone, that beautiful, vast savannah. Decades and decades passed. But then, in 1997, Richard LeBlond, inventory specialist with the Natural Heritage Trust Fund, found a 117-acre area near the site of the original savannah. Its ecology is nearly identical to the savannah Wells once cherished. The newly discovered longleaf savannah has the same rare soil type and virtually the same plant assemblage, and it supports more than 170 native plant species — including six rare plants and 10 plants on the Natural Heritage Program’s watch list — the mix of species replicated nowhere else on the planet: savanna Indian-plantain and white-seeded beaksedge, toothache grass and slender nutrush. Discovering this area was as close to finding a remnant of the old savannah as possible. What’s more, the land is home to a globally rare grasshopper, the broad-winged sedge grasshopper found in only three other populations on the east coast. This area has never been farmed. Portions of it are beneath a CP&L power line where regular



A TRIO STUDIES PLANTS IN THE NEWLY FOUND SAVANNAH. (PHOTO COURTESY NC COASTAL LAND TRUST, RUSTY PAINTER)

mowing by the company has helped preserve the area’s ecological diversity, according to LeBlond. And, to put icing on the cake, this land is for sale.

The Coastal Land Trust and Conservation Trust for North Carolina are working to purchase the land. In April, the groups negotiated a one-year option on the savannah. They are now in the midst of a fundraising campaign to raise \$120,000 — 60 percent will pay for the purchase price of the land, and the remainder will pay for site restoration, monitoring and management. The two trusts intend to dedicate the site to Wells, naming it the B.W. Wells Savannah.

On October 28, a fundraising event for the land will be held at the Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh. Sponsored by the NC Coastal Land Trust, the Conservation Trust for North Carolina and the NC Wild Flower Preservation Society, the event is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. and last two or three hours. LeBlond and Dr. James Troyer, author of a biography about Wells, will speak at the fundraiser. For more information, contact Nancy Schultz at the NC Coastal Land Trust at (910) 790-4524.

Division of Parks and Recreation Monthly Attendance Report

					% CHANGE	
	AUGUST	TOTAL YTD	AUGUST	TOTAL YTD	(2000/2001)	
DISTRICT/PARK	2001	AUG. 2001	2000	AUG. 2000	AUG.	YTD
EAST DISTRICT						
Cliffs of the Neuse	14,468	97,864	12,559	99,120	15%	-1%
Fort Macon	136,428	949,056	142,066	981,588	-4%	-3%
Goose Creek	10,316	81,108	6,929	91,954	49%	-12%
Hammocks Beach	25,800	143,512	24,042	142,686	7%	1%
Jockey's Ridge	164,125	785,283	162,931	852,074	1%	-8%
Merchants Millpond	6,087	60,098	7,211	62,669	-16%	-4%
Pettigrew	7,419	65,787	6,567	57,103	13%	15%
SUBTOTAL	364,643	2,182,708	362,305	2,287,194	1%	-5%
NORTH DISTRICT						
Eno River	29,855	220,188	23,068	192,922	29%	14%
Occoneechee Mountain	2,618	24,727	2,236	19,612	17%	26%
Falls Lake	134,770	956,146	37,368	603,754	261%	58%
Hanging Rock	43,426	290,520	46,308	288,564	-6%	1%
Kerr Lake	189,012	1,454,252	145,012	1,152,512	30%	26%
Medoc Mountain	5,908	47,195	10,077	54,770	-41%	-14%
Pilot Mountain	41,727	276,525	35,654	245,564	17%	13%
William B. Umstead	34,322	269,668	37,566	280,710	-9%	-4%
SUBTOTAL	481,638	3,539,221	337,289	2,838,408	43%	25%
SOUTH DISTRICT						
Boones Cave	2,405	21,124	2,671	22,773	-10%	-7%
Carolina Beach	27,789	183,975	26,369	166,570	5%	10%
Fort Fisher	48,514	480,148	69,498	394,658	-30%	22%
Jones Lake	10,886	94,586	11,470	87,684	-5%	8%
Jordan Lake	127,992	938,748	122,240	945,416	5%	-1%
Lake Waccamaw	9,916	72,946	4,140	52,051	140%	40%
Lumber River	4,770	35,161	4,610	28,105	3%	25%
Morrow Mountain	48,500	356,060	45,980	254,600	5%	40%
Raven Rock	9,038	81,191	9,902	77,202	-9%	5%
Singletary Lake	1,308	14,798	1,400	10,877	-7%	36%
Weymouth Woods	1,759	17,034	1,981	18,802	-11%	-9%
SUBTOTAL	292,877	2,295,771	300,261	2,058,738	-2%	12%
WEST DISTRICT						
Crowder's Mountain	26,773	185,615	28,441	208,564	-6%	-11%
Gorges	11,911	67,696	17,412	58,339	-32%	16%
Lake James	27,474	200,195	25,663	189,254	7%	6%
Lake Norman	33,873	176,631	16,671	195,005	103%	-9%
Mount Jefferson	10,412	61,333	11,370	60,654	-8%	1%
Mount Mitchell	63,644	336,693	89,649	318,079	-29%	6%
New River	17,877	91,168	15,056	96,236	19%	-5%
South Mountains	15,154	135,202	8,184	110,732	85%	22%
Stone Mountain	48,284	342,186	86,320	484,438	-44%	-29%
SUBTOTAL	255,402	1,596,719	298,766	1,721,301	-15%	-7%
SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL	1,394,560	9,614,419	1,298,621	8,905,641	7%	8%

JONES LAKE STATE PARK



SCOUT CAMP TEACHES WATERCRAFT SAFETY AND SKILLS



ELIZABETHTOWN – More than 100 girl scouts from Bladen and Sampson counties participated in a five-day camp at Jones Lake State Park. Jones Lake staff provided interpretation and education programs on several topics, helping the participants fulfill badge requirements. Camp activities included sailing, canoeing, kayaking, arts and crafts. The camp was sponsored by the Bladen County Girl Scouts-Pines of Carolina Girl Scout Council. These pictures were taken during the camp.

Mission

The mission of the North Carolina Division of Parks & Recreation is:



to protect North Carolina's natural diversity;

to provide and promote outdoor recreation opportunities throughout North Carolina;

to exemplify and encourage good stewardship of North Carolina's natural resources

and

for all citizens and visitors of North Carolina.

The Steward

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